

# GONDWANA CONNECTION

WILDLIFE TOURS

## BIRDING MILNE BAYS ENDEMIC 2015 TRIP REPORT

20<sup>th</sup> November-6<sup>th</sup> December 2015



Milne Bay Province in eastern Papua New Guinea is rarely added to birding itineraries for this amazing country. Even rarer still, is there an attempt to secure all of the endemic bird species. This is largely due to the fact that they are spread out amongst the large number of islands that go to make up this province and require some real effort.

We at GONDWANA CONNECTION Wildlife Tours have the knowledge, expertise and guides to make this rather optimistic adventure a reality. After all, we focus our PNG tours on this very beautiful region.

## BIRDING MILNE BAYS ENDEMIC 2015

### DAY 1

All participants were required to be in Cairns on the day prior to departure (20<sup>th</sup> November) and accommodation was booked at the **Coral Tree Inn**.

Having some spare time in Cairns nearly always ends up being eaten away doing some birding along the mudflats along the Cairns foreshore and this time was no different. I picked up 32 species within a very short time and these naturally included a nice variety of migratory waders.

This evening I met up with my two travelling companions, **Derrick Rowe** from New Zealand and **Bruce Greenfield** from the USA. Derrick was not coming along on this trip for birds, but for his very specialized interest in group of plants commonly known as Ant Plants and Milne Bay Province enabling him the chance to encounter numerous species in their natural environment. Bruce on the other hand was there for the birdlife.

### DAY 2

An early start was required this morning as our Qantaslink flight departed Cairns for Port Moresby at 6.20am.

On arrival at Jackson Airport moving down to the domestic terminal to check in for our PNG Air flight to Gurney Airport in Alotau, Milne Bay. Due to the relatively short stopover in Port Moresby, we stayed at the airport until our flight departed.

The Alotau flight only took about one hour and on arrival were picked up and taken to Napatana Lodge. After dropping our gear off in our rooms and a refreshing shower, we popped up to the bar to indulge in our first SP Lagers. Not a bad drop!



After lunch, I picked up our hire car, a Toyota Land-cruiser and later popping into town to do a bit of essential shopping. We also took the opportunity to visit the local markets.

The balance of the afternoon was spent having a catch-up nap and doing a spot of birding from our bungalow balconies. Species picked up, include **Red-cheeked Parrots**, **Yellow-faced Myna**, **Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds**, **Dusky Myzomela** and a bunch of others.

Locally caught fish, chips and salad for tea, was followed by another cold beer. By this stage, all were ready for some shut eye.

### DAY3

After breakfast we ventured off by road to our first temporary home, **Hilltop Guesthouse** near **Saisaida Village** in the **Sagarai Valley**. There was the opportunity to stop at several points along the way to allow us to add to our tick lists. No earth shattering species picked up, but we did get an **Oriental Plover** on the roadside in a recently planted Oil Palm plantation.



Figure 1 Oriental Plover

Hilltop is owned and run by the local mission and proceeds go towards maintaining the mission's "School of Destiny". Pastor Douglas Pitoni and his band of



volunteer teachers offer the opportunity to give the areas young children a strong start to their education. In addition to this, they also provide a very enjoyable place for us to spend a couple of days.

Lunch was followed by a short drive and walk through the nearby areas of Alluvial Rainforest. Our guide **Enoch Bulunamur** had located a new **Raggiana BOP** lek at this site a few months earlier. As has happened in the past, the display tree had been cut down to make way for a garden. Despite this set-back, we still managed to get both **Raggiana** and **King BOPs** in the near-by forest. These being supplemented with numerous other species including **Pinon's Imperial Pigeons**, **Grey Crows** and our first **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** for the trip. This being a black billed juvenile.



Derrick had decided to stay back at the mission and check out the numerous Ant plants in the near-by trees and was rewarded with three species.

#### DAY 4

The plan today was to hike up to a hilltop located to the south east of the village and camp out there that evening.

We normally allowed about three hours to complete this ascent, but plenty of time had been allocated to carry out this rather exhausting walk. Derrick had decided that the walk was going to be too strenuous for him and opted to return to Hilltop Guesthouse.



Figure 3 Emerald Monitor

department, was a beautiful close encounter with an **Emerald Monitor** *Varanus prasinus*. This being only the second specimen I have seen in the wild. VERY NICE!

On finally getting to our bush campsite, we set up the tent and bedding for the night. The guys also created a seat, table and kitchen from the surrounding materials. While this was happening, Enoch got a Papuan Frogmouth for us to see.



Figure 2 Ant Plant species

This was a bit unfortunate, as we found two additional Ant Plants up on this higher ground and as it turned out, one of these may be a new species.

At the beginning of the walk we picked up several **Glossy Ibis** feeding along a rainforest lined river. These just looked out of place in this environment and were a first for me in Milne Bay itself. Other nice sightings on the way up included **Palm Cockatoos**, **Blyth's Hornbills**, a **Variable Goshawk** nest (With fledgling near-by) and a nice local variant of the **Beautiful Fruit Dove**. The icing on the cake in the non-bird



Figure 4 Red-bellied Pitta or Papuan Pitta



After a much deserved rest and evening meal, we had recovered enough to get out there again. A night walk up here is a must, as this site has a wealth of wildlife and you would not want to miss the opportunity to experience it.

Tonight was to prove to be as good as ever. Numerous great invertebrates kept me fascinated and these being topped up with a few herps, including a nice **Bent-toed Gecko** *Cyrtodactylus epiroticus*. Great views were had by all of a roosting **Red-bellied Pitta** or now known as the **Papuan Pitta** *Erythropitta macklotti* due to a recent split of this species.

There was a bit of confusion over the identity of a roosting small kingfisher. The lores of this bird appeared to be white in our torch light, but in hindsight, we believe the colour reflected was not



Figure 5 Some great bugs were also on offer.



Figure 6 Bent-toed Gecko

as it appeared and the bird was in fact a **Papuan Dwarf Kingfisher**. Our conclusion being based on its size, general body colour and habitat in which it was encountered.

## DAY 5

The priority this morning had been to catch the **Magnificent Bird of Paradise** at their display lek. This display site was some distance away and it was decided that it would not be desirable to attempt this before the long walk back to **Saisaida**.

Before heading off, we did a spot more birding nearby and picked a few nice birds. We picked up numerous species previously seen, like the **Raggiana BOP**, **King BOP**, **Palm Cockatoo** and plenty of **Blyth's Hornbills**. There was however a few other ticks like a nice number of **Papuan King Parrots** and the great little pair of **White-rumped Robins**. This last species being a lifer for me.

The walk back off the mountain turned out to be a real effort and took considerably longer than we had expected. Bruce's feet were giving him some problems and this combined with the high humidity, meant

numerous stops had to be made. Our pick-up vehicle was certainly a welcome sight once we did get back to the road.

Just before reaching the road, we had a wonderful view of a large dead tree that was being used by both **Red-cheeked Parrots** and **Eclectus Parrots** for nesting.

The evening meal and beds at Hilltop Guesthouse were indeed very much appreciated by our rather shattered, weary bodies.

## DAY 6

With farewells done, we drove back to Alotau and dropped off our hire vehicle. We then had to turn around and head straight back to Gurney Airport to catch our PNG Air flight to Misima Island in the Louisiade Archipelago. Enoch was also joining us on this leg of the tour as well.

This flight took a little under one hour and on arrival were met by our local guide **Pala Kaki** and taken to **Bwagaoia Guesthouse** and had our lunch.



Figure 7 Bwagaoia Guesthouse

The afternoon was spent checking out around town, the picking up our food and water requirements for the next four day boating leg of our little adventure.

Off course a few beers had to cap off our evening meal.

## DAY 7

With all our gear transported down to the waterfront, we finally met up with our skipper **Elvis Leonard** and his navigator **Seta**. Supplies and all persons on board, we finally headed off in this 24 foot open dinghy, commonly called Banana Boats. Our final destination for the day being **Tagula**, on **Sudest Island**, the largest island in the **Louisiade Archipelago**. Over the next few days, we were to learn just how good our crew were at their jobs.

This first stage of the journey entailed us island hopping along a chain of islands that basically run from Misima to Tagula. There was obviously the uncontrollable need to investigate some of these along the way.

The first stop was on the uninhabited **Kimuta Island**. Even though no one actually lives on this island, there was a number of sailing canoes along the shore and many fishermen use it as a resting spot and place to smoke their fish catches. There was not a large number of bird species present, but lots of birds. Species included



**Louisiade White-eye, Flourey Imperial Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo Dove, Orange-footed Scrub-fowl, Spectacled Monarch and Lesser Frigate-birds.**

Our Next stop was a low coral atoll with a couple of hundred **Brown Boobies** nesting on it. There was also a single pair of **Masked Boobies** nesting there as well. As we came into the shallows, a Reef Shark was cruising along the shore. Probably hoping for a young bird to flutter helplessly into the water. Lots of **Lesser Crested Terns** also used this low piece of land as a resting spot.

**Manuga Island**, located just a short distance away, was chosen for our lunch stop. A **White-breasted Sea Eagle** took to the air as we approached and my first definite **Greater Frigate-bird** glided around over-head. The **Louisiade White-eye** was fairly common here as well. **Black-naped Terns** were frequently seen in this area, along with **Brown** and **Black Noddies**.



Figure 8 Derrick acting a bit macho on Kimuta Island. Local sailing canoes can be seen in the back-ground.



Figure 9 - Brown and Masked Boobies nesting

While boating between land points, the boys could not help throwing in a line and this just about always being rewarded. This afternoon, they hooked Skipjack Tuna and Trevally for our evening meal.

On arrival at **Tagula Village** we were presented our very first encounter with one of our three main target endemic species for this location, this being the **Tagula Meliphaga**. It was intended to camp at



Figure 10 - Enoch fell in love with a particular baby Brown Booby



Figure 11 - Myself, Bruce and Derrick



this site, but on arrival, the person in charge of the government station greeted us and offered the use of a vacant house. These people are so friendly and hospitable in this part of the world.

## DAY 8

The plan for today was to stop at several points along **Sudest Island** and position ourselves for the best possible chance to get across to **Rossel Island** tomorrow.

A quick bird around Tagula revealed no new species, but **Purple-bellied Lories**, **Red-cheeked Parrots**, **Black Sunbirds** and a few others were common. Other species included **Northern Fantails**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Shinning Flycatchers**, **Pinon's** and **Floury Imperial Pigeons**. On the walk back down to the wharf, we found many **Pitcher Plants** growing along the side of the road.

With our gear loaded, we headed off once again out over these absolutely beautiful waters. At times we would encounter pods of dolphins and at one point found ourselves in the centre of an amazing large group that consisted of two species. The amazingly small **Spinner Dolphins** were only too happy to ride our bow wave and put on a wonderful display of acrobatics.



The next village at which we stopped allowed us access to some partly cleared hillsides and it was hoped that this would give us some vantage points to get our other target species. We managed to tick the **Louisiade Flowerpecker**, **Grey Whistler** and also heard the **Tagula White-eye**. This bird however would not show itself. Dipped, but will get it next year.

The next stop-over was on a very rough limestone island with mostly dry shrubby vegetation. What made it worth the visit was that it was the nesting site for hundreds of pairs of **Floury Imperial Pigeons**, **Black Noddies** and **Singing Starlings**. The nest of a **White-breasted Sea Eagle** topping off the island. We also spotted our only **Beach Kingfisher** for the trip here.

On one of the only landing spots here, there were lots of signs of the hunting of the **Floury I/Pigeons**.

The tell tail sign of lots of terns gathered in one spot led Elivis and Seta to their next fishing spot and were rewarded with two **Blue-finned Tuna**. That was tea taken care of for tonight.



The skill of these two chaps was simply amazing when it came to finding their way through the many reefs. In one area, we had to pass through the **Yuma Passage** or **Snake Passage** as they referred to it by. This was the only safe



passage between Sudest and Yeina Islands. This took much skill and care to achieve.

As the day passed, the sun turned up the temperature and the open boat afforded very little protection. You were very appreciative of your hats and sunblock in these situations.

**Rambuso Creek** was the next stop and a wonderful bunch of people live here. The kids had just finished school and were very interested in this boat load of visitors.

We could not miss the chance to take a walk up onto the high ground behind the settlement and have another go for the other two Sudest Island endemics on our list. We had picked up a few repeat species and had started off back

down the hill, when I picked up the unmistakable call of a butcherbird. After moving down through a garden, I began to scan the opposite side of a small valley and then there it was. My very first **Tagula Butcherbird!** Happily sitting out in the open calling its head off. Several hundred metres away, but in good view. Eventually, I was able to get Bruce to come down and then shortly after Enoch. All three of us being able to celebrate a lifer. I was beginning to doubt whether we would find this bird.

On getting back to the boat, we found that one of the young ladies had offered to cook the fish for us and delivered them back to the boat, complete with rice and vegetables. As I previously said, these people are simply wonderful.

This site will be an over-night stop on our next trip in 2016.

At this point we had to get a move on, as there was still some way to go before finishing the day up at **East Point**.

With the light fading, we had to move over a large area of shallow reef and the boys boating skills were really put to the test. Just as it got dark, we pulled up against the rocks at the base of the village. Our local guide Pala and Elvis then went up and spoke to some of the villagers. Within a very short time, there had been an offer to allow us to stay in a ladies house. She very quickly prepared two rooms and the veranda area for us to put down our bedding, with mosquito nets.

Coffee was prepared for all, while our previously prepared evening meal was re-heated. Again, such wonderful hospitality! Fresh water for bathing, was not available here, due to the long period since their last rain. El Nino is certainly affecting many areas of Milne Bay this year.

## DAY 9

Despite the need to make maximum use of today's limited time that we would have available to visit Rossel Island, we still wanted to have a look at the areas above the village here at East Point.

An early breakfast done, we headed off up the hill and before long got not only more **Tagula Meliphaga**, but also close-up views of the **Tagula Butcherbirds**. A pair of these literally sat over the track. In addition to these, we got the **Louisiade Flowerpecker**, **Channel-billed Cuckoos** and many other repeat species.

While wandering around up here, the remains of a marvellous stick-insect were picked up. I will be doing night walks on our next trip out here and this species will be on our wish-list. NOTE: Since coming back to Australia, there has been a possible identification of this species. It is possibly a male *Eucrcantha calcarata*. ?????



With farewells and a thank you to all done, we headed off to what was just a faint shimmering speck on the horizon.

The species of interest here consisted of several endemic sub-species, including the nominate race of **White-chinned Myzomela** *M. a. albigula* and **White-bellied Whistler** *P l. meeki*. The recently split **Rossel Paradise Kingfisher** was of a high priority. Derrick was also hoping to locate a species of endemic Ant Plant from this island.

Time would be restricted here and we really could not afford to be here anymore than 3-4 hours, as we did need to be back at Tagula Village by nightfall.

As we got nearer the island, the thought went through my mind. How the hell would we find what we wanted in the limited time available to us. This rather large island consisted of rainforest clad mountains, mangroves and large areas of grasslands.

We came ashore at **Pambwa**, an abandoned government station, as the guys knew that we could access freshwater here and we certainly wanted the opportunity to freshen up. Sitting nearby was a small group of chaps enjoying the local past-time of chewing Beetlenut and we wandered over for a chat.



Figure 13 The man of the moment holding an Ant Plant. A big thank you to him!

Maybe luck was on our side, although you should not get too excited by people's claims. Given that this fellow appeared to know what he was talking about, we agreed to allow him to show us the way and believe me, we did not regret it.

Shortly after, we were in a small streamside gully and Derrick was photographing the plant he was pursuing.



Figure 12 Remains of what is possibly a stick insect called Eurcantha calcarata

One of these fellows responded positively to Derrick's enquiry regarding Ant Plants and when I showed him the **Rossel Paradise Kingfisher** in the field guide, he responded to that by saying that one was roosting near his house the previous night.

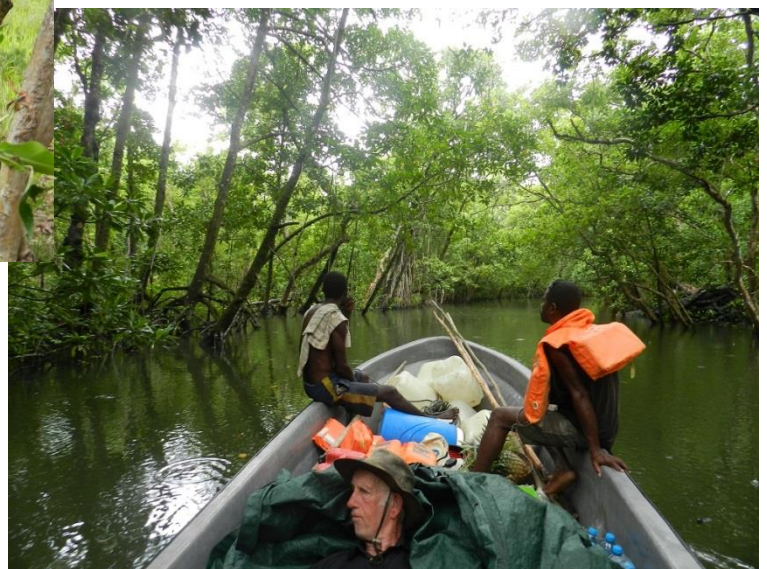


Figure 14 Boating in for the Rossel Paradise Kingfisher

With this success under our belt we headed back down to waterfront again and proceeded to boat up a small watercourse through mangroves and I picked up a couple of **White-bibbed Fruit-Doves**. There was also a kingfisher that at first thought to be a **Collared Kingfisher**, but had what appeared to be a black cap. Maybe the light was playing tricks with us. The bird off course disappeared, so we just had to be left guessing what it was. After about twenty minutes or so, the boat was tied up on the edge of a Sago Palm swamp and we headed off on foot.

After another fifteen minutes of walking quietly through Alluvial Rainforest and village gardens, it was suggested that we just stand and listen for our kingfisher. With no luck here, we slowly started walking on and then bang, there it was. Our very first **Rossel Paradise Kingfisher** and what a great view we had.

With our main targets under our belts, we headed off back to the coast. A few other species being picked up along the way, these including **Shinning Flycatcher**, **Leaden Flycatcher** and **Louisiade White-eye**.

With a special thank you being said to our hero of the moment, we headed off again into the wide open ocean. It was intended that we take the most direct route to Tagula, as there was some distance to cover.

I think this will have to be an over-night stop on our next trip.

The wonderful **Spinner Dolphins** made another appearance during the course of the afternoon. Elivis and Seta could not help themselves and put the lines out again on two occasions. The first, picking up four nice **Blue-finned Tuna** and next, two huge **Yellow-finned Tuna**. These requiring two people to lift them into the boat. These last two fish made one hell of a mess in the front of the boat.

After a very exciting day, we eventually arrived back at Tagula just on dark. Instead of walking up the hill to the government station, we got permission to stay at a house down near the waterfront. Coffee all round was the first priority and while we set up the bedding, the guys prepared the fish for smoking overnight. They also cleaned the boat of the mess made by the Y/F Tuna.

It was not hard to get to sleep tonight!

## **DAY 10**

After breakfast, we packed the boat and headed off to Bwagaoia on Misima Island. A slightly different route was chosen for today, as the sea was a bit rougher and we need to use the islands to shelter us slightly from the swell. The headland that protects the Tagula wharf was certainly a welcome sight by the end of this boating leg.

Back at Bwagaoia Guesthouse, a shower and clean clothes awaited. Having the bulk of the afternoon free, Bruce, Enoch and I wandered down into town and had a walk out to the headland. The town was very quiet, as it was Sunday afternoon. Not a lot of birds about, but we did get a few including **Pacific Emerald Doves**, **Shinning Flycatchers** and **Spectacled Monarchs**.

A few cold beers this afternoon went down very nicely.

## **DAY 11**

As our flight was not departing until lunch time, there was the opportunity to have a bit of a look about Bwagaoia and we decided to go up and check out the areas around the abandoned mine pits. A small group of **Pacific Black Ducks** (The first I have seen in Milne Bay) had set up home on the smaller pit, but other than that, no new species.



After dropping around to say farewell to Elivis and meeting Pala's family, we headed off to the airport for our flight back to Alotau. There was a bit of an issue with Bruce's air ticket. This being due to my booking it on the wrong date. With the plane actually sitting on the runway, we had to come up with a solution very quickly and the problem being resolved by him flying out under Enoch's name. A big thank you to Enoch for agreeing to stay behind and flying back home two days later. At the airport we bumped into two other birders, Melissa Hamilton and Tom Cullinan. Look forward to catching up with them again in the future.

Following the afternoon flight back to Alotau/Napatana, there was a hot shower waiting. The first for eight days and how wonderful it was. Simple pleasures!

The balance of the afternoon disappeared very quickly with the need to sort out some details for the next leg of the trip, but I did manage to get a few birds while wandering in and out of town, including some **Orange-fronted Fruit-Doves**.

A different menu and comfortable bed finished the day off nicely.

## DAY 12

An early morning breakfast.

After breakfast we packed our gear for the next of the village stay parts of this tour. Four nights out on the **D'Entrecasteaux Islands**.

Our guide, **Waiyaki Nemani** picked us up and then we drove out to East Cape to hook up with the banana boat that would take us out to **Sibonai Guesthouse** on Normanby Island. Along the way we managed to get a couple of species of Ant Plants growing on Pandanus in grasslands along the roadside.



Figure 15 The recently completed dining area room at Sibonai.

Sibonai is located at the eastern end of **Sewa Bay** at the base of rainforest clad mountains and offers the opportunity to stay right in amongst this wonderful site. Recent upgrades of the facilities were great. The mostly completed new shower and toilet block will really lift the profile of this Guesthouse.

Well done to Waiyaki and all concerned.

After dropping our gear off in our rooms, lunch was served.

The afternoon walk produced a number of repeat species **Purple-bellied Lory, Eclectus Parrots, Black Sunbirds**, and various others. One new one for the afternoon walk, was the locally endemic **Curl-crested Manucode**. Our second guide Pamsie, took Derrick out to see some Ant Plants and

other epiphytes growing nearby.

The evening meal offered a variety of local dishes and as always fresh fruit to follow up.

After tea, we headed out for a bit of night spotting. This producing **Marbled Frogmouth**, but the **Papuan Boobook** *Ninox theomacha goldii* that normally live in a dead tree in the next village could not be located. Mostly due to the fact that the tree had fallen down since my last visit and had moved on.

## DAY 13

An early walk before breakfast produced some great birds, including **Golden Monarch**, **Tawny-breasted Honeyeater**, **Spot-winged Monarch**, **Brown-backed Honeyeater**, **Spectacled Longbill**, **Curl-crested Manucode** and the icing on the cake would have had to be great views of a **Red-bellied Pitta** or this population now being known as the **D'Entrecasteaux Pitta**. This bird, apparently only recently being separated off as another species. At first Waiyaki had problems locating the calling bird. Trying to judge just how far away it was being the issue. As it turned out, the bird was facing away from us and when finally located, turned out to be quite close. This was not only a lifer for Bruce and me, but Waiyaki had never actually seen one himself. A great spot! One sighting that could not be confirmed, was two small birds feeding on the blossom of a Coconut Palm and I believe they were **Pygmy Longbills**. As I was the only one to see them and the sighting could not be confirmed, they did not get ticked off. This would have been another lifer for me.

With this under our belts, we headed back for breakfast.

The next walk took us up onto slightly higher ground around the village gardens. The most exciting sighting turned out not to be a bird, but what the locals call the Black Kundu Lizard. This canopy dwelling species called the **Bogert's Monitor** *Varanus bogerti* was Waiyaki's only second sighting and a lifer for me. The amazing thing was that Pamsie also got one down near the village on the same morning.

Another great sighting for the morning was a pair of **Red-cheeked Parrots** exploring a potential nest sight in a large dead tree in which **Double-eyed Fig Parrots** were also nesting. This population of Fig Parrot on Normanby Island is *Cyclopsitta diophthalma virago* and this was the best view I have been able to experience of these.

As the afternoon heated up, it was very easy to just kick back and relax for a while.

Waiyaki wandered off for a bit during the afternoon and on returning, informed us that he had got another look at the Pitta. Today was certainly the day for



Figure 16 Bogert's Monitor up in canopy.



unusual sightings.

After our evening meal, I decided that I would go out and have a look for my other interests, Stick Insects. Bruce and Derrick joined me and we managed to get a number of specimens of two species. One was most likely a species from the *Megacrania* genus and the female pictured here is most likely from the *Eucrcantha* genus. I will have to do more work to try to determine the species.

## DAY 14

Another early walk did not turn up anything out of the ordinary, but we did get a pair of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** nesting, **Golden Monarchs** again and an **Azure Kingfisher**.



After breakfast and wishing a farewell to our friends in the village, we headed off by boat to our next destination on **Fergusson Island**.

A morning tea stop at **Duchess Island** produced a couple of new trip species. I managed a quick look at **Nicobar Pigeons**, good views of **Mangrove Golden Whistlers** and the **Louisiades White-eye**. This is a very isolated population of this White-eye.

Our boat trip turned up plenty of **Black Noddy**, **Brown Noddy**, **Lesser Frigate Birds** out over the open water. **Little Terns** and **Lesser Crested Terns** were also on the sand bar at Duchess. The **Flying Fish** offered us much amusement as they skipped and glided over the water. We also got turtles, **Dugong** on two occasions, **Spinner Dolphins** and the most amazing sighting was of a small **Marlin** that appeared to be trying to evade a predator. It leapt out of the water a number of times, with its dorsal fin outstretched. At one point we disturbed what appeared to be unusual flying fish, but turned out to be a large group of small squid. They leapt out of the water with their bodies outstretched which made them look like they were gliding.

On arrival at **Gomwa Eco Guesthouse**, our next stay, we met up with the owner, **Siyosi Solon**. We had planned to stay here, but due to the effects of El Nino, the village was having serious water issues and it was decided that we would be better to stay up at the **Maedana Guest House in Salamo..** This was run by the United Church ladies group and proved to be quite comfortable.



Figure 17 Maedana Guest House



After a wonderful lunch we took a leisurely stroll around the surrounding areas. At one point we were introduced to a young **Sugar Glider** being hand raised by a family.

Over the course of the afternoon arrangements were made for our transport to **Sebutia Bay** for the following morning. It was decided that we would need to get an early start, so it was to be out of bed at 4.00am and the vehicle would then pick us up at about 4.30am.

This early start was deemed necessary so as to get us to the **Goldie's Bird of Paradise** display site before the birds left to return to the hillsides. Given the limited time available to get this species, we were only too happy to be up by then.

Fed and showered we hit the sack early.

## DAY 15

Despite the very early start, breakfast was waiting for us and a packed lunch as well. Even with the best motivation however, the 4.30 start was a bit optimistic and we ended up getting away at 5.00am.

The drive proved to be relatively easy in the Toyota Landcruiser Troopy and we finally met up with the land owner **Moses Gadi** and his daughter **Margaret**. We then drove to the village at the head of the trail and began our thirty or so minute walk into the display lek. At this time it was light enough to see quite well. Despite Moses being a rather lean elderly chap, he maintained a cracking pace and took some keeping up with.

I must mention that, much of this area is currently being logged by a Malaysian logging company and a lot of the habitat is being destroyed. Moses had decided that he was not going to allow his land to be damaged and as a result, this is probably the only Goldie's BOP display site at sea level. It is certainly the easiest to access.



Figure 18 Bruce, Derrick and Siyosi waiting for the Goldie's BOP

of another bird in the canopy on the other side of the track. Once Bruce had got a good look, Derrick and I moved in for our turn. We saw the male and what appeared to be a juvenile male at the lek.

With this species under our belt, we were happy to head back and wait for the vehicle to pick us up again. While waiting we sat around and chatted to some of the locals. We also had a quick introduction to their chicken and Cocoa production areas. There was also the chance for a bite to eat and drink before leaving.

Thanking Moses and the others, we hopped into the Troopy and headed off.



Figure 19 Moses Gadi is on the right

By him allowing others to come and see these wonderful birds here, he has the ability to earn an income from his land, but still allow it to stay intact.

### ONE OF THE WONDERFUL BENEFITS OF NATURE BASED TOURISM.

After reaching the site, we simply had to sit and wait for the birds to come to us. Within a very short time, the first calls echoed out above our heads and we got a glimpse of a male. Once the bird appeared comfortable and not spooked by our presence, Bruce, Waiyaki and Moses moved in under the tree. Bruce was able to see this lifer displaying above his head.

For the time being, I stayed back and got some glimpses



From here we were to move over to the Dei Dei Hot Springs.

Waiyaki dropped Bruce, Derrick, Siyosi and myself off at the head of the track and went off with the driver to pay our access fees. We walked into the hot springs in what had turned out to be a very hot afternoon. Not the best conditions for birding, but we were here now and made the most of it. This is a very interesting area to visit, but sometimes the weather just gets the better of you. Derrick managed to get a species of Ant Plant along the creek at the back of the main active area.



With our needs covered, we walked back to the road and to the awaiting vehicle. An easy drive back to Salamo was followed by a shower and then time to put our feet up.

During the afternoon, Siyosi came down to join us and we went for a walk through some areas of garden to do a spot of last minute birding. No new species presented and we eventually ended up back at Gomwa for some refreshments. A good friend of Siyosi, Bernard (Shortened to Ben) came to join us and much jovial chatter followed. These two old boys are real fun to be around and I do very much enjoy their company.



After the evening meal and a bit of a chat, we headed off to bed. Tomorrow involves a lot of travelling.

## DAY 16

On awaking today, it was obvious that Bruce and Derrick had had a bad night, with both of them being quite sick. Not the best of news considering the long boat ride back to East Cape that we had ahead of us.

After breakfast and farewells, we carried our gear down to the wharf and loaded up. Farewells said, we set off over fairly calm waters that run between Fergusson and Normanby islands.

Figure 20 Siyosi on left and Ben on right. Two wonderful mates.

This was not about to last. As we rounded the northern end of Normanby and moved out into the Goschen Strait, the choppy water hit us. This weather is quite unseasonable as the SE winds have normally stopped by this time of the year, but again the effects of El Nino strike again. The Banana Boats are very stable craft, but being flat bottomed, they do not cut through the waves. Instead, they bounce over the top of the waves. This makes for a very uncomfortable ride.

By this stage Derrick was feeling a little better, but Bruce was still quite ill. Waiyaki was concerned that he had contracted Malaria, but as it turned out it was most probably a result of something the two guys had eaten. Even though we thought this, Waiyaki still insisted that we call into a small village along the way and get some local remedy for Malaria made up. Lemon Grass, Garlic and boiling water went to make up this local medicine.

As we moved east, the conditions just seemed to get worse and the trip that should have taken about three hours, just seemed to take forever. Derrick developed a new name for these boats and that was Torture Boats. He has vowed to never get into another one again. I do have to admit, by the end of the day, I would have been quite happy to have made the same vow. As with all things, time softens the memories and I will most likely be back out there again next year.

As we pulled up onto the beach at East Cape we were all very sore and extremely pleased to be back on dry land. Our vehicle was waiting for us and within a short time had loaded our gear and had started the drive back into town.

After a hot shower, it was time to kick back and rest our weary bodies.

Farewell drinks and dinner at Napatana finished the day off. Back home to Australia tomorrow.

## **DAY 17**

This morning all were feeling a lot better and managed to keep breakfast down.

Bruce and I walked back into town, as I had a couple of things to sort out and people to see. I said my farewells to Waiyaki and some others. It was then off to the airport and our PNG Air flight to Port Moresby.

By 6.50pm, we were walking back out of Cairns Airport and back to reality.

I cannot wait until my next trip to Milne bay again in October 2016.

### **END OF TOUR.**

#### **FOOT NOTE:**

This trip was originally developed to chase up the endemic bird species to be found within Milne Bay Province. Due to the mixed interests of the Bruce and Derrick, we ended up not focussing strictly on the birds. We did manage 8 of the 13 Milne Bay endemics however and this does not count the White-chinned Myzomela, which I am fairly sure I got. Not confirmed, so not counted.

A bird list for this trip is available by emailing me at [des@gondconnect.com.au](mailto:des@gondconnect.com.au)

I mentioned a number of times of the hospitality shown by the Milne Bay people and they did it out of the goodness of their hearts. We did however pay for all of these kindnesses shown to us. It is our belief that the benefit of Nature Based Tourism has to be passed on to as many people as possible. This ensuring that people like Moses Gadi continue to look after and conserve what to them is their home and their livelihood.

If you feel that I may be able to help you in any way with plans to visit Milne Bay, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We will be carrying out a similar trip in the later part of October 2016. If interested, please get in touch and I will keep you informed of developments.

Now before I finish this off, I must specially thank Bruce and Derrick for taking part in this little adventure. I hope there are no permanent damaging effects. It was a pleasure to have met you both and been able to share the experience with you.

Last but not least, an extremely big thankyou to the guys that guided for us, transported us and carried gear for us on this very memorable trip. This is particularly directed at Enoch Bulunamur, Pala Kaki and Waiyaki Nemani. You guys are awesome and worth your weight in gold. If anyone needs a guide or help with a Milne Bay tour, these are the chaps to contact. Check out our website under Milne Bay Contacts for contact details.